

**Statement of Rep. Tom Davis**  
**Ranking Republican Member**  
**Committee on Oversight and Government Reform**  
**April 19, 2007**

*H.R. 1905, The District of Columbia House Voting Rights Act of 2007*

“Taxation without representation!” The phrase that sparked this nation’s revolution of independence still fuels the aspirations of District residents, especially this week when they paid taxes to a federal government in which they are not fully represented.

So, this House once again considers a bill to correct the historical anomaly that leaves those living closest to the seat of our great democracy without the same rights as their fellow citizens living everywhere else in our vast nation. We persist because the cause is right, and patience a vice against long festering injustice.

Today, there is no need to repeat everything said three weeks ago. The history, the case law, the Constitutional analysis have all been recited. We’ve heard from the opponents of this legislation who rely on a single argument championed by one Constitutional lawyer. We counter with the studied opinions of two former federal judges and twenty-five legal scholars from the best law schools in the country. Anyone who would be moved by those arguments has already been persuaded.

Instead, I want to focus on the moral imperative to act, even in the face of difficulty or doubt. A great man of letters once said, “Nothing will ever be attempted if all possible objections must first be overcome.” There will always be an excuse not to try. Refute one opposing argument, another sprouts like a weed. In this case, the scales of justice cannot be moved with weightless legal theories. The balance is tipped decidedly by the solid facts and heavy effects of disenfranchisement endured every day by those who live here.

The people of the District of Columbia have served in every war this country has fought. Think about that for a second. These Americans bravely risked their lives, not to defend the freedoms they had, but to protect the promise of freedoms they hoped to have restored. They dutifully pay many millions of dollars in federal taxes year in and year out - with absolutely no say in how that money may be spent. But these are the obvious sacrifices of living in the Federal City. The small, daily contributions of this city’s citizens should not be overlooked. District residents truly serve this nation every day performing thousands of federal jobs. But when this House votes on the shape, size and cost of that government, they are invisible, unseen and unheard in debates that affect their lives more directly than most.

As a Republican, I am not willing to bear the shame of failing to try to resolve this matter after two hundred years. According to our own website, "The Republican Party was organized as *an answer* to the divided politics, political turmoil, arguments and internal divisions, particularly over slavery, which plagued many political parties in 1854." Our first presidential candidate, John Fremont, ran under a slogan of "Free soil, free labor, free speech, free men, Frémont." We exist as a party to increase representation and liberty in this country, and in this world. This legislation is in the highest traditions of the party that fought for free speech, fought to abolish slavery and fought to give women the right to vote.

So I ask my Republican colleagues to see through the fog of armchair constitutional analysis and do the right thing. There is still time to cast a Republican vote, a vote to preserve our party's heritage, a vote to expand liberty.

Opponents of this legislation will apologize that the Constitution won't allow them to do the good they wish they could do. I'm sorry but I can't accept that. At the end of the day, this is not an argument about what Congress *can* do. It's about what Congress is *willing* to do.

Those of us who are supporting this bill are not nervous about its constitutionality. We are convinced that this Congress has all the authority we need to expand freedom and liberty in this nation. Might we be wrong? Possibly. The Supreme Court has never decided a case like this. But even if we are proven wrong, there is nobility in attempting to do the right thing. There is honor in acting, not just talking, to end injustice.

To those still shackled by doubt, I offer the words of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., "Take the first step in faith. You don't have to see the whole staircase. Just take the first step." Please take that step with me. Support this bill.